



# Elephant In The Room

## MHS Says Good-bye to Hilliards Chocolate



Empty chocolate boxes from last year's Robotics fundraiser  
Photo By CATHERINE MAYO

By CATHERINE MAYO

For years, Milton High School students have sold Hilliards Chocolate bars in the halls to raise money for clubs. But this fall, a long-standing federal rule is finally being enforced at the high school which bans most food sales during the school day.

On August 1st, 2012 the National Department of Public Health banned the selling of competitive foods and beverages. When referring to competitive foods and beverages, they mean any food or drink that is sold outside the cafeteria that does not meet the required national standards. Despite the 2012 ban, Milton High School has permitted the selling of non-compliant foods-- specifically, Hilliards Chocolate -- during the school day for years.

However, the director of Food Services in Milton Public Schools, Natalia Perez, says that this year, chocolate bars can only be sold "30 minutes before or after the school day," causing confusion and disappointment among clubs who raise money with the Hilliards Chocolate bars and the students of Milton High School who enjoy buying them.

The major reason Hilliards Chocolate is no longer allowed to be sold during school hours is because it does not meet the nutritional guidelines of a competitive food that can be sold during school time.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health regulations, to meet the nutritional standards of a competitive food allowed to be sold at school, the food must either "contain 50% or more whole grains," have "fruits, vegetables dairy, or protein," as the first ingredient, or have "¼ cup of fruit and/or vegetable."

"This chocolate bar fundraiser is considered a competitive food. What's classified as a competitive

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## New Computer Policy Causes Commotion

By ELOISE MARTLAND AND SOPHIE SHAW

When underclassmen entered Milton High School on Wednesday, August 27th, many brought their personal devices as a result of a new computer policy. However, some have encountered issues with getting a chromebook from the school, several not having a device for over two weeks of learning. Exacerbating this fact, student and parental confusion arose regarding school communication.

Over the summer, Milton updated their policy to allow rising 9th and 10th graders to use their personal devices for school work. Previously, only 11th and 12th graders had been able to use personal devices, whereas underclassmen were required to use a school-managed devices.

The new policy primarily resulted from an issue with MCAS last year. Many underclassmen were already using their personal devices, leaving their school-issued devices at home. Without regular use, these devices would miss several key updates, resulting in MCAS delays.

The difficulties with Chromebook distribution largely resulted from a form sent out in PowerSchool that requested parent or guardian signatures in order for their child to receive a computer.

"There was a form, The Chromebook Loan Agreement, that was put in Powerschool, and there were a lot of emails sent, about parents needing to sign that," said Library Media Specialist Janice Alpert. "If the form was not signed, that delayed things."

Although this form seemed simple, several problems emerged. One of the main issues was that in order for this form to be filled out, the internet was needed, along with a computer. Students who did not have reliable internet access at home had to go to the Milton Public Library or another location with accessible internet. This can be extremely difficult for those without licenses, or who live far away from a computer or internet connection.

Furthermore, some freshmen who already had computers from middle school tried to get a computer from the library when they already had one at home. "The other issue was that even if a parent signed the Chromebook loan agreement, if the student had another Chromebook from the middle school, then they weren't issued a Chromebook," said Alpert.

"Students would come to me and say, 'I didn't get a Chromebook.' and I would check, and their parent would have signed the loan agreement, but what had happened was when they did that the I.T. department emailed the student back and said, 'We see that you signed the Chromebook loan agreement, but you will not be issued a Chromebook because according to our records, you still have this [Chromebook] from the middle school.'"

In addition to students keeping their Chromebooks from middle school, many students missed important emails, creating further issues. Alpert said, "The problem was

that when I would email or talk to the tech department, they said it happened many, many times, where I would ask the student to bring up their email, and they never read that email from the tech department." Many teachers in the beginning of the year introduced the idea of checking emails daily if possible. This way students will be able to stay on top of work and possible conflicts, such as the computer issue.

With these issues arising, Alpert is focused on the future. What will this policy look like next year? Alpert said, "I am taking many, many notes. I have a whole Google Doc of what I thought went well, what I thought didn't go well. Ultimately, there are many people working on this, the tech department, and I think that, yes, we don't have a set like system yet ready to go, but the principal and the technology person -- and I'm sure I'll be a part of it -- we are going to compare our notes and figure out what can we do better next time." Even though no plan has been formalized for next year, the tech department and Alpert are beginning to come up with ways to avoid delays like these.

Aside from conflicts and issues and of course, emails, the tech team has kept their heads high, and are all working extremely hard at fixing issues that are still persistent.

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Graphic By LAYLA RAYMOND



# Burns' Popcorn Countdown is Coming to a Close

By SOPHIE SHAW

The smell of fumes with a hint of butter and smoke doesn't sound the most appetizing. On the other hand, banning burnt popcorn from one student for a whole year as a result of this smell makes a lot of sense. This month's teacher feature leads us down to the first floor, and into room 120.

Since 2004, Melissa Burns has worked in all fields of life science here at the high school. She is now both a college prep and honors biology teacher and the known anatomy teacher. Just walking into Burns' rooms feels like entering a place of comfort, even for those who dislike science. From small talk in the beginning of class, to helpful explanations, there is consistently a flow of friendship and positive feelings inside her classroom.

Aside from the overall positives of entering the classroom, there

is a noticeable piece of writing on the upper right corner of Burns' white board. It says, "Burn Popcorn, January 16th, 2026." This piece of writing might lead incoming students to think of a possible future lab or experiment. However, this is not the case.

"A student in my advisory burned popcorn and it smelled awful," Burns said, "And so they are not allowed to have popcorn in advisory for one whole year." Despite this not being an experimental food test, the scenario could actually be used in one of Burns' lessons about graphing and learning the effects of independent and dependent variables.

On the subject of lessons, Burns shared that her favorite labs and experiments to perform are the 'McMush' experiment in freshman biology, and the dissecting labs in anatomy. On the other side of this

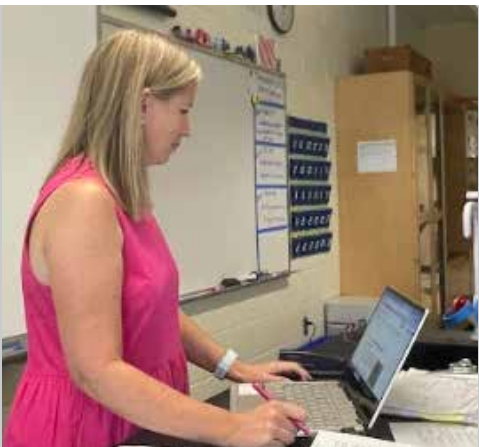


Photo By SOPHIE SHAW

spectrum, Burns said "...Freshman honors, numbers in science," when asked about a least favorite lesson or lab, "just because there is a lot of grading...". Along with the numbers, Burns also agreed with the students who say that honors biology is extremely difficult.

Burns' devotion to her students shows through her friendly smile and warm greetings. In other words, Burns' stands by her advice of staying kind, which clearly shows through her classroom and way of teaching.

## Chocolate Ban

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food are things that are not smart snack certified. All the options in the school cafeteria are considered smart snacks," said Perez. These guidelines are not necessarily just Milton Public Schools guidelines but the USDA school nutritional standards, which the school is now enforcing.

This new rule will affect everyone who is a part of any clubs or activities at Milton High School, as many clubs and activities use chocolate sales – specifically during lunchtime – as one of their main sources of

income.

Some students have concerns about the future of their clubs and activities. Olivia Wolfson, a member of the Junior Class Student Government says, "It's incredibly disappointing that during junior year– the most important year of funding for our high school experience, we have lost our most consistent and easiest way to make money. It's going to make raising money for things like prom and graduation a lot harder."

Cory Wong, president of Milton High School's Book Club and member of Milton High's Asian Cul-

ture Club and Debate Team says, "I think it's kind of sad because personally for me I really liked the chocolate and it will be hard to purchase now with it only being sold outside of school hours."

This decision is a major transition for Milton High School's clubs and activities that rely on the students' love for Hilliards Chocolate to raise money for them. However, Milton High's students are sure to find creative and equally enjoyable products that will replace the chocolate bars and bring in money for their clubs.

# What Would a Phone Ban Mean for Students?

By ELOISE MARTLAND

On July 31, 2025, the Massachusetts State Senate passed a bill to ban cell phones all day in schools. Now the bill sits in the hands of the State House of Representatives, which will determine its fate. But what would change at MHS if the bill were passed?

Specifically, this new law would ban cell phones from "bell-to-bell" use, meaning that students would not be allowed to use their phones in the hallways, in the cafeteria, or in their classrooms. Instead, phones would be stored in pouches or lockers. That being said, the state has not been very clear on other ways the phones would be stored. According to the Massachusetts State Legislature's webpage, there would be "other storage options for electronic devices."

The only reason students would be allowed to

use their phones would be if they have a medical necessity or an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) that would require them to use and to carry their phone at all times. If the bill were to pass, schools would also have to have another way for students to contact their parents or guardians and vice-versa.

The Massachusetts Senate has expressed that high schools across the state would have several options for phone storage, the first being pouches. For example, Yondr Pouches are common in schools around the world. They are magnetic-locking pouches that students would put their phones in at the beginning of the day and could only unlock at the end of the day. However, many schools end up using them for only a year or two before switching to another system, such as those in Folsom, Cali-

fornia, where, according to an NBC News report, "after just one year, administrators decided not to continue with the costly program" and instead shifted to an "off and away" phone policy.

Bubble wrap pouches are also an option. K-12 Dive, a website that focuses on news in school environments, highlighted DeWitt Clinton High School, in the Bronx, a borough of New York City. There, the students store their cell phones in bubble-wrapped pouches at the beginning of the day, and school staff give them back at the end of last period classes.

Another option would be cell phone lockers, similar to the cell hotels that MHS presently uses in individual classrooms. These "cell hotels" are numbered pockets students are supposed to leave their phones in for a period. However, as

stated by the Massachusetts State Legislature, if the proposed law were to pass, students would have to leave their phones in lockers all day.

When asked how MHS would change the policy if the bill were to pass, Principal Karen Cahill said that the details would come down to "school committee policy with the district decision. So I would rely on a conversation from the superintendent's office and school committee to work with not just myself, but the other principals in the district to be consistent with whatever that decision is."

Education Week, a website that informs teachers about a range of ideas concerning student learning, has articulated that over 31 states (and Washington D.C.) have laws that mandate banning or restricting cell phone use in schools. Some states, like

# The Cats are Hot!

By GRETA MCGEE

The MHS girls' volleyball team is off to a strong start this fall season, holding a four-to-one record and four consecutive wins as of September 12th.

After persisting through a difficult season in 2024, which included eight five-set matches and ended with a nine-to-nine record, the Wildcats are utilizing lessons in resilience and collaboration to their advantage in 2025. This year, the team is led in part by Senior Captains Sarah Clarke, Elizabeth Maye, and Vivian O'Neil.

Keira Clark, a middle hitter and three-year member of the varsity team, says, "We definitely worked hard for all of our wins and had great perseverance as a team last year. It's things like this that we knew we needed to carry over into this season and build off of."

The official varsity lineup for this season includes no underclassmen, and as most of this year's varsity players have shared the court for several years, the chemistry of the team is further fortified by their similar levels of experience and solid friendships. Madison Patel, a junior and setter for the Cats, said, "We all know each other well personally, which helps us work together during games."

On Tuesday, September 2nd at 4:00pm, the Wildcats opened their season with an away game against the Needham Rockets, where they suffered a loss of zero to three. However, following this tough feat, the team proved their resilience by working together to secure wins against Walpole, Weymouth, Braintree, and Hingham.

The squad's most recent matchup against the Hingham Harbormen took place in Milton High School's very own Copeland Field House on Friday, September 12th at 4:00pm. Here, the team played their first five-set game of the 2025 season, finishing with a victory of three to two. Though the Cats prevailed, the game was intense, with neither school winning two sets in a row.

By playing to each other's strengths on the court, each team member contributed to their win. When reflecting on which plays were essential to the Cats' victory, Clark said, "I think the best series of plays in that game was in the five-set when we were down four to two. Zahria Daley stepped back to the service line, serving eleven or twelve straight, getting us a thirteen to five lead."

With their fierce start and unquestionable bond, the Wildcats have made it clear that they are prepared to beat their 2024 record using strong determination and teamwork.

Potential Phone Ban  
(continued from page 3)

Florida, only ban them for grades K-8, while others, such as Oklahoma, have banned them for all grades. Pennsylvania and Delaware have incentive policies, meaning that they allow schools to apply for grants to pay for pouches to store cell phones.

So, are the policies worthwhile? If cell phones were banned all day, then students would have to talk to each other during lunch and build social skills. Even at Milton High School, where students are only allowed on their phones during passing periods, there is still enough time for teachers to worry about the impact of these devices on the students’ mental

health. “When I see students who are walking down the hall and can’t even pick up their face, walking into other kids, or just so immersed in their phone and not interacting [with] other people, that’s what’s concerning to me,” said Principal Karen Cahill. On the other hand, many students prefer the present phone guidelines and would like to use their phones in the hallway and the cafeteria. Freshman Ella Farina said, “I can’t survive without it. It’s a part of me.”

Additionally, social media is known to cause a decline in overall student well-being and mental health, but what’s interesting is that this idea is not necessarily true in schools. The Lancet Region

Health-Europe Journal published a study that surveyed 1,227 teens, ages 12-15. Some students attended schools with cell phone bans in place and others did not. The study found that banning cell phones in schools had no correlation with improved mental health.

Meanwhile, some parents and students worry about the risk in schools if kids are not able to access their phones. When asked about an all-day phone ban, Freshman Burmah Kearns said it would be “unsafe.”

Yet, phones can also cause issues during emergencies. If a phone went off loudly during a lockdown, it would ruin the point of being quiet and could make the situation unsafe. Cahill added, “In a lockdown

scenario, of course, I would want to know that my child is safe. However, misinformation gets out there on social media, right? So, how do we control that?” Furthermore, students might try to contact their parents and not focus on the teachers’ efforts to keep them safe.

In order for the bill to pass, it would have to go through the House of Representatives and be signed by Governor Maura Healey, who has already indicated her support for the ban. Then, the administration would have to rework the present guidelines for changes to be made at Milton High School. Either way, one thing’s for sure: cell phone usage has become more of an issue for teachers and students alike.

The Elephant in the Room is always looking for feedback! If you have suggestions, feel strongly about an article, or think there’s anything The Elephant in the Room should address, feel free to submit a letter to our editors. Email your letter to [mhs.eitr@gmail.com](mailto:mhs.eitr@gmail.com)



Sincerely,  
The Elephant in the Room Staff

# The Practice of Free Speech in Milton and America

By ADAM CHEAIRS

The battles dominating America’s headlines are increasingly over speech itself. Charlie Kirk’s assassination has set off a national struggle over how to remember him. Jimmy Kimmel’s suspension turned a late-night monologue into a referendum on free speech. And when the United Nations found that Israel’s violence in Gaza has amounted to genocide, that single word gained the power to shape Palestine’s future. These events are reshaping the stakes of free speech: which words can be said, who gets to say them, and at what cost. How do you prepare high school students to live, and to speak, in such a world?

“Our world has so many things happening so fast,” said Dr. Efe Igbo-Osagie Shavers, the district’s director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. “You finish one news article, and another one’s already popping up. Students are having a hard time processing, not just because of the magnitude of what’s going on, but because of the access to information with social media.”

Community circles, a project of the department, are meant to slow the rush of reaction and replace it with reflection. More than a response to harm, Shavers sees them as a way of preparing for it. “We don’t want to wait for devastating moments,” she explained. “We want to create safe spaces where you feel heard, where you can be brave and speak up.” The point is not only to resolve disputes but to build a community durable enough to withstand them.

The work also extends to who is leading those conversations. One of Shavers priorities is diversifying Milton’s teaching staff and retaining teachers of color once they are hired. “If you only have one homogenous group, then you only get one way of thinking. But if you have a diverse

makeup of staff, the strengths of each group can complement each other.”

At Milton High, 108 of the school’s 116 full-time education staff are white; just 5 are Black, 2 are Hispanic, and 1 is Asian. Across the district, the pattern is nearly identical. According to district records submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 90% of Milton’s 563 teachers are white, with fewer than 60 non-white teachers combined.

The imbalance mirrors the state as a whole, but sits in sharp contrast to the increasing diversity of the students in front of them. For Shavers, those numbers explain why representation is not cosmetic but fundamental: the adults in the classroom shape whether students see difficult conversations as possible, fair, or even worth having at all.

Rob Hale, an English teacher, sees the challenge in his classroom.

“We’re living in an age that doesn’t value knowledge,” he said. “It values the rhetorical mic-drop more than it values facts.” Too often, Hale added, students trade evidence for feelings, mistaking personal impressions as arguments.

To counter that instinct, Hale turns to the Harkness method, which makes knowledge a shared responsibility. Students read texts and arrive independently at ideas, then gather in class together around the namesake oval table to discuss, affirming or challenging ideas while both seeing and being seen by their classmates.

“It lets students lead the conversation and practice monitoring their own behavior,” he explained. “Am I dominating the conversation? Am I not listening enough to others? Am I being silent and letting the conversation happen without my contributions?”

That monitoring, he argued, is its own civic training. “It’s easy to be persuaded by bluster, by appearance, and by the vibe of the speaker rather than content.” Hale pointed to the first televised presidential debates in 1960, when television audiences who saw Richard Nixon’s sweaty, flustered appearance swayed toward his opponent John F. Kennedy while radio listeners, who could only hear the debate, stuck with Nixon.

For Hale, the lesson is that style can eclipse substance; people too often reward confidence and performance over the strength of an idea. “I think it’s very human to judge based on appearance or attitude.”

Principal Karen Cahill emphasized restraint when asked about the school’s role in shaping such conversations.

“There’s not one right way to do this,” she said. “We have to be impartial. When those things are happening globally, we have to respect perspective and keep an open mind. And we have to be mindful of our audience – not just students, but staff and families.”

She pointed out that speech stretches beyond the classroom, taking shape in clubs, on the fields, and even at the lunch table. That variety, she added, is a strength in a moment when public schools across the country are facing intense scrutiny.

By staying silent about contentious events, schools circumvent the charges of partisanship. Simultaneously, though, students are left without guidance when the loudest voice dominates the conversation - a problem not so far from what Hale sees when the best-sounding argument can obscure the best-founded one.

The debate club has its own method of handling this neutrality. Asked whether the win-lose format of

debate helps or hurts civil discourse, junior and debate captain Ben Neugebauer, didn’t hesitate.

“It’s helpful, because you have an endpoint to gauge the validity of your arguments. With a nonpartisan judge, you can reflect on what’s working and what isn’t.”

For Neugebauer and his team, debate provides the structure that broader culture lacks. “A lot of it comes down to research, because you learn to rely on evidence and facts,” he said. “People say whatever they want. Debate teaches you to support everything you say with evidence. You have to prove it.”

If the national stage offers little room for listening, then a different experiment is happening at Milton High School.

In Mr. Hale’s classroom, the geometry of a Harkness table pulls every student into view and a circle of equal voices. In that class, Hale listens more than he speaks. The spectacle fades, replaced by the rarer, slower work of listening to understand each other.

Down the hall, Culture Cats students sit shoulder to shoulder in advisory period, a talking piece moving from hand to hand. Designed as a community circles test run, Culture Cats was first to reimagine advisory as a place to practice dialogue, where students learn to lead the conversations themselves and where what might have stayed unsaid in the rush of a school day finds room to emerge. It no longer feels strange to speak as classmates.

At the table, in the circle, in the principal’s office, and indeed at the podium, the voices lean toward the same hope this moment scarcely allows: time, patience, and the willingness to listen before deciding what to believe.



# ELEPHANT ENTERTAINMENT

Photo By MACY BURNS

Mr. Hamermesh, buisness teacher, at the “No Hate Tour” assembly last month.



Photo By ELOISE MARTLAND

October fifth through eleventh is Banned Book week, with this year’s theme being Censorship is so 1984. The exhibit in the library honors the “4000 unique titles,” according to PEN America, a literacy group, that were banned during the 2024-25 school year.



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\*Students receive all issues for free



I told you running from peasants was thinning!

Comic By THOMAS HAYDEN

## ANAGRAMS

- 1: Military Branch
- 2: Flower Pot Syn.
- 3: College Living Space
- 4: On Red \_\_\_\_\_

Heavy Rain

Save

Dirty Room

Alter

Games By NICO HAYDEN

## RIDDLE

What's bought by the yard and worn by the foot?

3				7		1	
	4		5	2			
7		9	4				
2		2					
		7	9		6	8	
						3	7
					9	2	6
				7	4		3
	6		2				4

SUDOKU

## Upcoming Fall Varsity Sports Schedule

Monday 10/13	Tuesday 10/14	Wednesday 10/15	Thursday 10/16	Friday 10/17	Saturday 10/18
	Girls Volleyball: at 4:00pm vs. Westborough in the Westborough high gym	Boys Cross Country: at 4:00pm vs. Brookline on the Brookline high Cross Country course	Girls Volleyball: at 4:00pm vs. Brookline in the Brookline high gym	Girls Swim/Dive: at 4:00pm vs. Walpole high at the Westwood high pool	Girls Volleyball Tournament at 9:00am vs. Westborough in the Westborough high gym
	Boys Soccer: at 4:30pm vs. Walpole High on Brooks Turf	Girls Cross Country: at 4:00pm vs. Brookline on the Brookline high Cross Country course	Boys Soccer: at 4:30pm vs. Needham High on Brooks Turf	Boys Football: at 6:30pm vs. Walpole high on Walpole high turf field	Girls Soccer: at 4:00pm vs. Higham high on Higham high turf field
	Girls Soccer: at 4:00pm vs. Walpole high on Walpole high turf field	Girls Field Hockey: at 4:00pm vs. Brookline on Harry Downes turf field	Girls Soccer: at 4:00pm vs. Needham high on Needham-Cricket field #1		

Schedule By ALYSSA ZULLAS

ANAGRAMS: HIRE A NAVY - VASE - DORMITORY - ALERT

RIDDLE: A CARPET